DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 195 358 PS 011 875

TITLE	Title 1, ESEA. Working with Schools: A Parents' Handbook.
INSTITUTION	Bureau of School Systems (DHEW/OE), Washington, D.C. Div. of Education for the Disadvantaged.
REPORT NO	ED-79-07109
PUB DATE	80
NOTE	69p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20204 ($2.00).
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Check Lists: *Educational Responsibility: Elementary Education: Home Study: *Informal Assessment: Institutional Characteristics: *Learning Activities: Parent Participation: Parent Responsibility: *Parent Role: *Parent School Relationship: Parent Student Relationship: Parent Teacher Cooperation: School Readiness
IDENTIFIERS	Elementary Secondary Education Act Title I: Parent Advisory Councils

ABSTRACT

This handbook offers practical suggestions on how parents can be better teachers at home and help their children learn better at school. Ways in which parents can work with the schools to insure the best possible education for children are discussed. The first of five sections deal with parents' rights and responsibilities in relationship to their children's education. In the second section, basic information parents should know about the school their children attend is discussed. To help parents assess their children's progress, the third section provides information about testing, and tips for getting the most from parent/teacher conferences. The fourth section reviews ways in which parents can participate in their children's education and support the school program. The final section, an appendix to the text, suggests some simple activities to do at home that will help children prepare for school, reinforce basic skills, and develop self-confidence. Each section of the text ends with a checklist that parents can use to examine their role in educating their children, to judge their child's progress, and to know where to go for help. (Author/RH)

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ED Publication No. 79-07109

ED195358

Title 1, ESEA

Working With Schools: A Parents' Handbook

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PS011875

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U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON: 1980

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office

FOREWORD

As parents, you play many roles in the lives of your children. One of the most important roles is as your child's first--and most long term--teachers. Your child will bring to school, and carry throughout life, the lessons learned at home.

Studies show that a child has developed much of his or her intelligence by age five, before many children have even begun their formal education. Research also indicates that a child develops at home the self-confidence that plays an important role in school achievement.

As your child grows older, the schools share these educational tasks, and they offer you new roles as paraprofessional, volunteer, advisor, and decisionmaker.

Today there are hundreds of books and articles on how to be good parents. This booklet draws on such information to offer practical suggestions on how you can be better teachers at home and help your children learn better at school. It shows how you can work with the schools to insure the best possible education for all children.

The booklet is divided into five sections. The first deals with your rights and responsibilities in relation to your child's education. We assume that you have a right to expect a good education for your child, and that this right carries with it a responsibility to help your child succeed in school.

In the second section, we examine the basic things you should know about the school your child attends--points of contact, philosophy of education, specific types of programs, and what to look for when visiting the school.

Knowing about the school is not enough. Does it stimulate your child to learn? To help you measure your child's progress, the third section gives you clues to watch for at home, information about testing, and tips for getting the most from parent/teacher conferences.

The fourth section reviews ways in which you can participate in your child's education and support the school program.

In an appendix to the text, we suggest some simple activities to do at home that will help your child prepare for school, reinforce basic skills, and develop self-confidence.

Each section ends with checklists that you can use to examine your role in educating your child, to judge your child's progress, and to know where to go for help.

We have directed the text and the checklists to you, but many of the activities depend on the policy and cooperation of local school officials. They provide the information, training, and assistance you need to fulfill effectively your educational responsibilities.

The checklists can also be used by these officials as a starting point for parent training. When many parents from a school or district question the same items, the school or district can focus its efforts or training on the problem areas. The checklists are a means to evaluate how effectively a school or district is involving parents in the schools.

Richard L. Fairley
Associate Commissioner/Director
Division of Education for the Disadvantaged

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This booklet was prepared by Mary Pat Pfeil under the direction of the U.S. Office of Education and revised and edited by its staff members.

This booklet includes ideas and information contributed by participants in a conference sponsored by the Division of Education for the Disadvantaged, U.S. Office of Education, and the Maryland State Department of Education in July 1979.

The conference explored ways in which parents can work with schools to achieve a better education for their children. Participating in the conference were:

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I. KNOW YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In 1979, the International Year of the Child, the U. N. General Assembly approved a Declaration of the Rights of the Child that included the following rights:

The right to affection, love, and understanding

The right to adequate nutrition and medical care

THE RIGHT TO FREE EDUCATION

The right to full opportunity for play and recreation

The right to a name and nationality

The right to special care, if handicapped

The right to be among the first to receive relief in times of disaster

The right to be a useful member of society and to develop individual abilities

The right to be brought up in a spirit of peace and universal brotherhood

The right to enjoy these rights, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national, or social origin

The fulfillment of these rights is the responsibility of society as a whole, and of the parent or guardian who is a child's first contact with the complex world in which we live.

Parental responsibility includes providing for a child's basic needs of clothing, food, and shelter; providing physical and emotional security for a child; and seeing to thousands of small tasks that help a child grow.

The Right to Education

As parents, you have a right to expect, and to see that your child

receives, the best possible education to meet his or her needs. This includes a right to be informed about educational programs available to children in your area, to be involved in the evaluation and placement of a child in a particular educational program, and to receive extra services for a child with special needs, such as physical or mental handicaps, limited English-speaking ability, or gifted intelligence and talents. It also implies the right to expect that children will have competent teachers; that schools will provide an educational atmosphere free from bias, discrimination, and disruption; and that you will be kept informed of your child's progress in school. Some of these rights are rights parents have on their own, while others are rights parents exercise on behalf of their children.

Certain legal rights of parents are spelled out in Federal laws, in particular the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974. These include the right to:

- Examine a child's cumulative school record upon request and to have it explained and interpreted.
- Challenge inaccurate or misleading portions of a child's records.
- Appeal unsatisfactory decisions made by school officials about a child's records.
- Allow a third party to review a child's school records.
- Expect that information in a child's school files will be treated confidentially by all school personnel.

A child's cumulative school record includes all official records, such as attendance data, test scores, psychological reports, health records, counselors' reports, and teachers' evaluations. It does NOT include informal

notes that teachers and administrators keep on a child's progress and/or behavior.

Other laws specify the legal rights of parents in regard to the education of handicapped children; the right to be informed about, and to appeal, school discipline; and rights that protect children from sex discrimination in schools. In addition, some States have passed laws that affect parents' rights in relation to a child's education, and many school districts have codes or policy statements that outline the rights and responsibilities of administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

The National Committee for Citizens in Education, a nonprofit public interest group, publishes a wallet-size "Parent Rights Card." The card lists 21 rights parents may have, depending on the State in which they live. The rights are grouped in four categories: Student Discipline, Student Instruction, Student and Other Records, and Other Rights, and include such rights as:

- To take legal action against a school official if a child has been disciplined with "excessive or unreasonable" physical force.
- To see instructional materials used in federally funded programs.
- In most States, to visit a child's classroom(s) at any time during the day, provided the parent first notifies the school office.
- In most States, to request that a child be excused from school activities that parents object to on religious, moral, or other reasonable grounds.
- In most States, to speak at all public meetings of the local school board.

The Responsibility To Educate

Every child has the right to be educated, and every parent has the right to expect an education for his or her child. But those rights can only be fulfilled if both parents and children assume the responsibilities that correspond to the rights.

In this chapter, we review some of the ways that parents can encourage learning at an early age. We list some of the actions that help a child develop skills and knowledge, and the attitudes that reward a child's effort to learn.

For instance, children who develop a sense of security and self-confidence at home are more willing to explore new learning experiences. Confidence can grow where each child is valued as different and special. Children should not be compared to one another. Emphasize your child's strong points and help overcome the weaknesses.

In order to grow children must develop their own abilities. This includes making their own mistakes. But you can help prepare your child for the independent activity of going to school.

Language is a child's first learning tool. The more words they hear and eventually use, the better they will understand these words when they see them in books. Listen with interest to what your child tells you, talk to your child, and read to your child frequently. If you make reading important and fun, your child will probably be eager to learn to read, too.

Young children need to learn to coordinate what their eyes see and their hands do. They need motor skills to hold a pencil correctly, to follow a line of print, to refocus their eyes from the blackboard to the print of a book.

Putting objects in holes of the same size and shape, matching colors, and stacking blocks all help. Later, children need games that introduce simple counting skills, puzzles that help them recognize and distinguish shapes, and books that introduce new ideas and words. Children need social skills, too. They feel most secure when you set guidelines for their behavior and they know what is expected of them. A child who respects other people and property is learning the self-discipline that will carry over to school behavior.

Once a child begins school, parents should see that the school meets a child's needs, and that the child, in turn, takes full advantage of the education available.

Below, we list some of the ways you can support and reinforce the school's teaching role. From this starting point, you will discover what works best for you.

A first concern is that your child attend school regularly. School attendance is mandatory in most States until age 16, and truancy laws hold parents responsible for children's unexcused absences. But beyond the legal implications of missing school are the learning and social issues. If children are not in school, where are they and what are they doing? If children are not in school, how can they learn?

To be present and ready to learn, children need enough rest and a good diet. A child who is tired or not feeling well is less able to concentrate and learn. Most schools offer breakfast and lunch programs that are partly paid for by the Federal government. Meals are provided free or at a reduced price to children who cannot afford to pay.

You and your children need to know what the school expects in terms of learning, behavior, and attendance. You should understand and support school requirements, rules, and policies and know the penalties for violations.

To know what is going on in school, visit the school a number of times each year. Most schools welcome visits from parents. Check beforehand to see that your visit will not disrupt classroom work or other activities. Talking to teacher(s) and observing the classroom(s) will help you determine whether your child is getting the help he or she needs, and what you can do to help.

Homework is important. Provide a place for your child to study or read in comfort. The rules you set for watching television should allow enough time for both homework and physical activity.

There are many ways in which you can keep informed of what your child is doing at school. Talk with your child and review the papers brought home. Don't do homework for your child, but do see that it gets done.

As an appendix to this booklet, we have suggested a number of activities that can help prepare your child for school and support the skills learned at school.

Parents in the PUSH for Excellence program sign a pledge that reads:

I am my child's foundation.

I will expect much from my child educationally.

I will expect much from myself to support my child's efforts.

The pledge implies that parents will work to insure a successful education.

In a number of school districts, teachers, parents, and students sign

printed agreements that back up their commitment to education. The illustration below is a copy of the agreement developed in the Operation Fail-Safe Program in the Houston Public Schools.

Illustration 1

Operation Fail-Safe

STUDENT-PARENT-TEACHER AGREEMENT

We know that learning can take place only when there is a combination of effort, interest, and motivation. Because we are all concerned about _____'s progress in school, we are going to do our best to promote his/her achievement.

This agreement is a promise to work together. We believe that this agreement can be fulfilled by our team effort. Together we can improve teaching and learning.

As a student I agree to:

- Work as hard as I can on my school assignments.
- Attend school every day unless I am sick.
- Follow the Code of Student Conduct.
- Ask my teacher questions when I don't understand something.
- Go to my public or school library at least once a week.

As a parent I agree to:

- Talk to my child about his/her school activities every day.
- Find out how my child is progressing by attending conferences with the teacher whenever needed.
- Limit my child's TV viewing and help select worthwhile programs.
- Encourage good study habits at home.
- Reinforce the Code of Student Conduct.

As a teacher I agree to:

- Provide motivating and interesting learning experiences in my classroom.
- Explain my grading system.
- Give feedback to the student about his/her progress.
- Find out what techniques and materials work best for the student.
- Explain the Code of Student Conduct to the student and his/her parents.

Most importantly, we promise to help each other carry out this agreement.

_____	_____	_____
(Student Signature)	(Parent Signature)	(Teacher Signature)

Signed on this___ day of _____, 19___ in support of OPERATION FAIL-SAFE, Houston Independent School District's parent support effort.

CHECKLIST: FOR PARENTS

Learning at Home

1. Do I avoid comparing my child to others?

   Do I praise my child?

2. Do I emphasize that my child is important and unique?

   By emphasizing what he or she does well?

   By encouraging special interests?

   By accepting my child as he or she is?

3. Do I help my child move toward independence?

   By giving my child jobs and responsibilities at home?

   By making my child feel useful?

   By encouraging my child to try new things?

4. Do I talk with my child?

   About what he or she is doing?

   About feelings?

   About things we see, hear, or do?

5. Do I listen to my child?

   Without doing something else at the same time?

   Being able to repeat what he or she said?

   Catching the meaning of what is being said?

6. Do I read to my child?

   Books that are suited to my child's age and interests?

   Books that belong to my child?

   Does my child see me reading? Do we go to the library?

7. Do I choose toys that will help my child learn?

Including his or her own books and puzzles?

Do we play together?

8. Do I teach my child respect for other people and property?

   By being courteous and careful myself?

   By pointing out examples of poor manners?

   By praising my child for using good manners?

School-Related

1. Does my child attend school regularly?

   On time?

   Do I notify the school if my child will be absent and why?

   Do I try to make routine doctor and dental appointments outside school hours?

   If required, do I send a written note following an absence?

   Do I encourage my child to find out about and make up schoolwork that may have been missed?

2. Does my child get the rest and food he or she needs at this age?

   Do we have regular bedtimes? At reasonable hours?

   Am I sure my child eats a good breakfast, either at home or at school?

   Do I pack a well-balanced lunch or make sure my child is getting lunch at school?

3. Do I know the basic school requirements and policies regarding learning, behavior, and attendance?

   How often do parents receive progress reports or report cards?

   Does the school have a conduct code? A dress code?

   What is the punishment for breaking school rules?

   Who carries out disciplinary actions?

   What are my rights and responsibilities as a parent?

4. Do I visit my child's school?

   How often?

   Do I know the name of the teacher and make it a point to talk with him or her?

   Do I visit my child's and other classrooms?

   Do I know the principal?

5. Does my child have a place to study at home?

   Is it well-lit? Away from the television?

   Is it comfortable?

6. Do I know what my child is doing in school?

   Do I check papers that come home?

   Do I supervise homework, without doing it myself?

   Do I read the school newsletter?

   If I notice a problem with schoolwork, do I talk with the teacher?

II. KNOW ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

Parents share the task of educating their children with many professionals, and you need to understand the roles each group plays in providing education. The key people in this structure are the Board of Education, school administrators (especially the superintendent), the principal, and the teacher.

When you know the different functions of each member of the educational team, then you know where to ask for information and how to influence decisions that affect the education of your child. As the only member of the team who is concerned with just one child, you are best able to help the system meet the needs of that child.

The School Board

The Board of Education, known by different names in different cities and towns, sets the general philosophy and overall policies for the school system. In general, its duties are as follows:

- Set policies, rules, and regulations that provide a good educational atmosphere in the schools.
- Decide what curriculum the school district will require.
- Provide a budget for personnel, equipment, and materials to assure a quality education for each student.
- Follow State and Federal laws in establishing school programs.
- Insure that the superintendent carries out board policies.

There is no single structure for a local school board. The makeup of the boards differs according to local needs and State laws. Most school boards are elected. Members may be elected at large (that is, to represent the entire school district), or by geographic area within the school district.

A board may include as few as four or five members or, in large cities, as many as 30 to 40.

Usually, the board forms committees to study and recommend actions in different subject areas such as curriculum, finance, personnel, and policies for assigning pupils to different schools and programs.

There are a number of ways that you can influence these actions. You can attend and testify at public meetings of board committees or the full board (you may need to arrange ahead of time to be on the agenda), write letters, and otherwise contact board members, particularly where boards include geographic or neighborhood representation. Parents are most influential when they act as a group with a common interest or purpose, such as requesting a bilingual program or protesting the closing of a neighborhood school. This can be done on an informal basis (simply getting a group together to attend a meeting), or by signing petitions, or by acting through organized parent groups, especially parent advisory councils. (See part IV for more information on advisory councils.)

The Superintendent and School Administrators

Most school districts divide the responsibilities of school administrators according to type of program and geographic area. The superintendent and local school administrators who serve under him or her manage the day-to-day operations of the schools. They have the responsibility to:

- Plan a curriculum and activities to meet the needs of all students in accordance with policies of the local school board.

- Provide the materials, personnel, and facilities necessary to carry out a good educational program.

- Establish policies and rules of attendance and behavior that will create an atmosphere conducive to learning.

- Make future plans, based on the needs of the students and recommendations of parents and teachers.

The superintendent's office and local school administrators can answer general questions that relate to programs in more than one school. Such questions may concern age requirements, special programs for children who are gifted or who have learning disabilities, after school programs, and dozens of other matters.

Questions about an individual school are best directed to the school principal. It is his or her specific duty to keep you informed about school programs, rules, and staff.

In addition, the principal sees that the school's instructional program is effective and meets the curriculum requirements set by the superintendent and the local school board. The principal develops and maintains a rapport with both students and teachers and tries to solve any school-related problems that students, staff, parents, or members of the community may have.

Principals at the elementary level usually oversee the education of 100 to 700 or more children, and cannot respond to questions about the individual learning needs of your child.

The Teacher

The teacher is the first contact for information about your child's progress, problems, or behavior. He or she has the information most readily at hand, and sees the child on a daily basis. He or she prepares learning activities for the class and adapts them to each child's needs.

Either you or the teacher may ask for a meeting. In most schools, parent/teacher conferences are scheduled two to four times a year. The next chapter tells how to get the most from these conferences.

You may expect teachers to:

- Notify you if there are any problems in school.
- Maintain an orderly classroom in which learning can--and does--occur.
- Deal with behavior problems fairly, reasonably, and patiently.

School Visits

You can find out a lot about a school by visiting the school and your child's classroom. You will have a chance to see firsthand what is going on when you serve as a volunteer, attend open houses, or just drop in.

On an initial visit to the school you should try to arrange a two-part tour; first, with the principal and then, with one of the students.

The tour with the principal is likely to emphasize the most positive aspects of the school--the best teachers, the extra programs, the newest materials and equipment.

Schools that allow students to serve as tour guides show their readiness to give responsibility to students. You can learn from student guides what they like and dislike about the school. Observe which aspects of the school seem most important to your guide.

You can also tell a lot about the atmosphere of a school by whether or not the principal and teachers know and greet each other and many of the students by name, and whether teachers and students are at ease when the principal visits classrooms.

The checklists that follow include questions to consider while you tour the school and visit classrooms.

CHECKLIST: YOUR SCHOOL

The Local School Board

1. How is the board elected?

   By the district at large?

   By neighborhoods?

2. When are elections held?

3. How many members are on the board?

   For how long do they serve?

   Do the terms of some members overlap so there is continuity?

4. When does the board meet?

   Where?

   Are the meetings open to the public?

   Are notices of meetings published in the local paper?

   Are agenda for the meetings available ahead of time?

   Who may speak at the meetings?

   How do you arrange to speak at a meeting?

5. Does the board publish a statement of educational philosophy and/or school policies?

   How often?

   Where are copies available?

6. Are minutes of board meetings a matter of public record?

   Where are they available?

   Are actions of most board meetings reported by the local media?

The Superintendent and Other Administrators

1. Who is the superintendent for the school district?

2. Where is his or her office located?

   What is the telephone number?

3. Does the school district publish a directory of school administrators?

   Where are copies available?

4. Is there a public information (or community services or community relations) office in the school district?

   What is the telephone number?

   What types of materials does the office publish and/or provide?

5. Does the school district have a statement of student rights, a dress code, a statement on student discipline, other policy statements?

   Where are these available?

   Who is responsible for developing such policies? Are they approved by the local school board?

The Individual School

1. What is the school address and phone number?

2. What are the school's attendance policies?

   What time does the school day begin?

   What time does the school day end?

   What is the school's calendar for this year (vacation, planning, holidays, other days off)? First and last days?

   What weather conditions may cause school closings? How are parents informed?

   If a child is sick, must the absence be reported to the office?

   If a child is not in school, does the office notify parents?

3. Is there a school handbook?

   Does it list principal and all staff members?

   Does it state school rules and policies?

4. In addition to the basic curriculum, what other types of instruction are available in the school?

Remedial reading and math?

Bilingual instruction?

Special classes for physically handicapped, mentally retarded, learning disabled, behavior disabled and/or gifted children?

Library services?

Private music instruction?

5. What types of noninstructional services are available at school?

Breakfast program?

Lunch program?

Health services, such as eye and hearing exams, immunizations, psychological testing, and dental checkup?

Are there costs for such programs?

6. What types of federally funded programs are available in the school?

Education for the disadvantaged?

Bilingual education?

Career education?

Parenting education?

Other?

Are explanations of the programs available?

7. What types of extracurricular activities are offered?

Sports?

Hobbies/clubs?

Field trips?

Are these offered during school hours, before school, or after school?

8. What are the school policies for keeping parents informed?

Is there a school newsletter?

How often are parent/teacher conferences scheduled?

When may parents visit classrooms? Must the school office be notified? If so, how far in advance?

Observing the School

1. Do children know the principal and greet him or her by name?
2. Is the principal's presence in a classroom a natural occurrence or does it disrupt the normal classroom routine?
3. Does the principal greet all teachers and at least some students and parents by name?
4. Does the principal make you feel welcome? Do he or she and the teachers suggest volunteer work that you could do?
5. Do you see other parents working as volunteers?
6. Are school hallways decorated with children's work?
7. Are hallways and bathrooms clean?
8. Are activities well-organized and supervised? Do they seem related to the school's learning goals?
9. Are classrooms decorated with attractive skills-related bulletin boards and samples of children's work?
10. Do children seem to know and obey classroom rules?
11. Is the teacher pleasant and cheerful?
12. Are children called by name?
13. Is there a variety of large group, small group, and individual work being done in the classroom?
14. Is there a place set aside for quiet study?
15. Are there extra books in the classroom for children to browse through and read?
16. Does the teacher move around the room while teaching?
17. Does the teacher respond to the needs or requests of individual children?

III. KNOW HOW YOUR CHILD IS DOING

When you hear the words assess and evaluate used about education, you may think of testing. Testing is an important means to gauge your child's learning needs and progress; however, it is only one of several methods the teacher may use. Others include teacher observation, oral or written work, and class participation.

Types of Tests

Historically, teachers use quizzes and tests at the end of a particular unit of study or period such as a semester (4 months) or school year, to see if a student has mastered the material studied. Such tests are generally referred to as "teacher-made tests" and may take several forms depending on the material covered and the purpose of the test. For example, a test designed to check recall of material read might be multiple-choice or fill-in-the-blank, while one whose purpose is to evaluate understanding might require the student to write a paragraph explaining why the colonists came to the New World.

Today your child may be called upon to take a variety of tests. Some will be developed and published by large nationwide companies; others may have been developed locally or by your State Department of Education. The number and types of tests seem almost endless. Many volumes have been devoted to listing and describing the tests published in this country each year. One such publication is the Mental Measurements Yearbook, which is available in most libraries or at the superintendent's office.

Despite the tremendous number of testing instruments available, most of the tests your child will take can be divided into two groups. The first group

of tests is referred to as norm-referenced. These tests are used to compare an individual to an average or "norm." When you examine your child's score on a norm-referenced test, you will be able to see how he or she compares with other children in the same age group--whether his or her performance in a subject area is above or below average. Many of the norm-referenced tests are called standardized tests and are given each year by school districts as a part of their testing program. Such tests enable educators to determine how well an individual, class, or the district as a whole is doing by comparison to a predetermined norm. Not all such tests, however, use such large groups as norms. If your child's teacher gives a test consisting of 10 math problems to a class of 25, and 13 of the children get 8 problems correct, then 8 is the norm for the class. If a child works 9 problems successfully, then he or she is above the norm; if he or she completes 7 or less successfully, he or she is below the norm.

The second type of test is referred to as criterion-referenced. Using this type of instrument a teacher is able to determine what areas are strengths and weaknesses in a child's performance. It cannot be used to compare one child to another. For this reason it is often referred to as a diagnostic test and is used only to identify the areas in which your child needs additional work. Almost any teacher-made test can be used as a criterion-referenced test, but many are also developed and published by large testing companies.

As a parent, you should not be overwhelmed by the vast amount of information obtained on your child each year. The following guidelines may aid you to understand the testing program in your school and help you use the results to benefit your child:

* Know the testing schedule for your child's class. Research indicates that children who are well rested generally do better on tests. If you know the test date, you can help your child by being sure he or she gets plenty of sleep the night before. You will also know when to expect the test results.

* Be sure that you understand the results. Many companies provide the school district with forms that explain the test results to parents. You should also talk with the teacher or guidance counselor to see how the test results will be used and how they relate to your child's school performance, to seek ways to overcome areas of weakness that show up in the testing, and to learn how to emphasize your child's strengths. You can discuss the tests used and your child's score at a regularly scheduled or specially requested parent/teacher conference.

Personalized Educational Plans

Some school districts are now requiring teachers to draw up Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) for each student. Recent Federal legislation encourages the use of such plans in Title I classes. (These are programs funded by Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act for children from low income areas who need extra help to perform at their grade level.) In Title I schools these plans may be referred to as Personalized Educational Plans (PEPs). In schools or districts where IEPs and PEPs are used, the plans are likely to be the major topic of conversation at the first parent/teacher conference of the school year.

What Is It? The major purpose of the IEP/PEP is to give direction to the learning experiences provided for the child. It attempts to focus on the unique characteristics and needs of individual students and prescribes an educational program that reflects these characteristics and needs. Addi-

tionally it should serve as a basis for coordinating the regular classroom program with any supplemental services the child may receive, such as Title I instruction.

How It Works. The teacher sets learning goals and objectives based on the child's areas of strength and weakness. For example, the teacher may decide from test results or classwork that a child needs to improve skills in the area of reading, such as the use of consonant blends (br, cl, sp). This becomes the learning objective.

Next, the teacher prescribes techniques, materials, and services to help the child gain or reinforce this needed skill. He or she may decide to use worksheets, a word game, and tapes. If the student attends Title I reading classes, the teacher will inform the Title I teacher of the plan so that they may work together to overcome the weakness. He or she may also ask the parents to work on the skill at home.

Although the individual plan is designed for a specific child, he or she will not necessarily require one-on-one teaching. He or she may work alone on a particular skill, with two or three others in a small group, or as one of a large group of children working with the teacher or aide.

Based on the child's progress, the plan will be reviewed and updated from time to time throughout the school year. Illustration 2 on pages 25 and 26 is a sample format for a Personalized Educational Plan which might be used in a Title I program.

The IEP/PEP presumes that you are involved in your child's educational program. It recognizes you as an important source of information about your child and as a partner in meeting his or her educational needs.

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Parent/teacher conferences are also useful for evaluating a child's school performance. A brief report by the teacher is not sufficient; the conference should allow for an exchange of information. Where appropriate, the child should be included.

Many school districts now publish tips to help both parents and teachers prepare ahead of time to get the most benefit from the conference.

Before the conference, you should talk to your child about school. You should be aware which school subjects and teachers he or she likes or dislikes, and where there are problems. You will probably have ideas about school rules and your child's classwork and homework. If you write down all your questions, the conference will go smoothly and take less time.

The teacher should be prepared to show samples of the student's work and to outline what will be covered during the school year. You should expect to hear how your child is doing in school, including specific information about progress in such important subject areas as reading and math. If you have a progress report, you may want to know how grades were determined. Does a good or bad grade show only what your child is or is not learning, or does it show how his or her performance compares to that of children of the same age or grade?

A conference also allows teachers to learn more about your child. You may wish to tell the teacher of any health conditions or family situations that may affect school performance. A teacher may ask whether a child can study comfortably at home and receive help when needed. A teacher should know how you perceive a child's special interests, talents, and needs.

Teachers may ask about study habits and responsibilities at home, and what types of discipline work best with your child. Social skills are another area both parents and teachers may want to explore. Such questions include how a child relates to others, at play and at work, and whether there are any pressures from classmates.

If you think your child needs special help--academically, emotionally, or with a speech, hearing, or sight problem--you can ask what sources of help are available.

At the end of the conference, review with the teachers what help is needed in school and what things you can do at home to help your child.

When there is a time limit on the regularly scheduled parent/teacher conference, you may not have an opportunity to discuss everything that concerns you. In such cases, you may request another conference at a time that is convenient for both you and the teacher.

After the conference, talk it over with your child and stress the positive things that were said ("John tries hard," "Mary is a good influence on her friends," "Sara does especially well in math"). Suggest ways to improve the weaknesses that were noted ("Let's try reading together 15 minutes each night," "Since the multiplication tables are causing you some problems, maybe we can practice them each morning").

Some schools ask parents to evaluate the conference (Illustration 3 on page 27 is a sample form used by the Houston Independent School District).

The Personalized Educational Plan and the parent/teacher conference do more than inform you of your child's progress. They provide an opportunity for close cooperation between home and school. To help the school assess your child's feelings, educational needs, and progress, you need to observe your child closely. The checklists following illustrations 2 and 3 suggest what you should look for.

Illustration 2

PERSONALIZED EDUCATIONAL PLAN
(Sample Format for ESEA, Title I)

Student _____ Grade _____ Birthday _____

Present School _____ Principal _____

Parent/Guardian _____ Phone _____

Date Developed _____

I. INDIVIDUALIZED NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Date	Diagnostic Technique	Level of Performance

II. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES, INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN, EVALUATION (See reverse side)

III. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND/OR SUPPORT SERVICES (if needed)

IV. PARENTS/GUARDIAN/SURROGATE PARENTS' ROLE AND ACTIVITIES

V. STUDENT'S ROLE AND ACTIVITIES

VI. SIGNATURES OF PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE P.E.P.

	DATE		DATE
(Title I Teacher)		(Parents/Guardian)	
(Regular Classroom Teachers)			
		(Student)	
(Other School Personnel)		(Principal)	

(Illustration 2, cont.
Reverse side of
Personalized
Educational Plan)

		INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN					
GOALS	OBJECTIVES	MATERIAL	METHOD	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	DATE	EVALUATION TECHNIQUE	RESULTS
.	a. b. c.						

Operation Fail-Safe

Illustration 3

PARENT EVALUATION FORM

PARENT/TEACHER CONFERENCE

_____
Date

Dear Parent:

In order to determine how much infotmation you received and how useful the conference was, it is necessary to have some written feedback from you. Please circle the response that indicates your feeling about each item. It is not necessary for you to sign the feedback form. After completing the form, please leave it with the principal. Thank you.

	YES	NO	NO RESPONSE
1. I was allowed to discuss the matters which concerned me most about my child's education.			
2. My questions were answered to my satisfaction.			
3. I felt at ease during the conference.			
4. The teacher(s) was courteous and treated me with respect.			
5. I received a plan from the teacher(s) of things I can do to maintain or improve my child's education.			
6. I think the plan is something that I can easily use with my child.			
7. I feel more positively about my child and his/her education.			
8. The conference was a positive experience.			
9. I plan to come to school again on the next conference day.			

10. Comments

_____

_____

_____

_____

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CHECKLIST: YOUR CHILD'S PROGRESS

Parental Observation

School Related

1. Does the school provide the textbooks or other reference materials my child needs for outside work?
2. Are all assignments checked and sent home periodically?
3. Are the textbooks my child uses attractive and interesting to his or her age level?
4. Is the homework my child does related to his or her learning goals?
5. Does my child have access to library books at his or her interest and reading level?
6. What subjects does my child like? Dislike?
7. How does my child feel about the teacher(s)?
8. Does my child talk about school?

Study Habits

1. Does my child ask when he or she needs help with homework?
2. Is my child able to pay attention to a task long enough to complete it?
3. Does my child know how to use the dictionary and/or encyclopedia when necessary?
4. Does my child read aloud with expression and without halting?
5. Can my child read silently?
6. Can my child answer questions after reading something?
7. Does my child have a quiet, comfortable place to study at home?
8. Is there a regular time set aside for study?
9. Do I see that the television, radio, or stereo does not interfere with my child's studies?

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Preparation

1. How often does my child's school schedule parent/teacher conferences?

   When?

   What is the time limit for each conference?

2. Do I feel comfortable requesting additional conferences?

3. Does my child's teacher notify me immediately if there is a problem in school?

4. Have I asked my child if there is anything he or she wants me to discuss with the teacher?

5. Have I made a list of questions I want to ask?

6. Have I reviewed my child's work to get some idea of what is being done in school?

Questions To Consider Asking

1. Is my child doing as well as he or she should in school?

2. Is my child working up to his or her ability?

3. Is my child performing at, above, or below grade level in reading and mathematics?

4. Do you group children for reading and math? If so, what group is my child in? How are children selected for each group?

5. What are my child's strengths and weaknesses in major subject areas?

6. What tests will my child take this year? What is the purpose of the tests? How will the tests be used?

7. Does my child need special help in any subject? Is such help available?

8. What will my child be learning this year in math? In reading?

9. Is there an individualized educational plan for my child?

10. How can I participate in developing the individualized plan? How can I support my child's instructional plan at home?

11. Are there regular homework assignments?

12. What schedule does my child have during the school day?

13. Does my child get along with other children?

14. Does my child respect the rights and property of others?

15. Does my child show any behavior, such as squinting, being tired or irritable, that may be signs of a medical or emotional problem?

16. What are the discipline procedures in the classroom?

17. Are there any discipline problems with my child?

Reviewing the Conference

1. Did the teacher listen to my comments? Was he or she unhurried and friendly?

2. Were all my questions answered?

3. Did the teacher seem interested in my child and familiar with his or her work?

4. Did the teacher seek my help in identifying the needs of my child or overcoming weaknesses?

5. Did I praise my child in some way?

6. Did the teacher and I gree on specific ways to help my child?

7. Do I understand what I can do at home to help?

8. Do I need to schedule another conference?

IV. KNOW HOW TO WORK WITH YOUR SCHOOL

We have seen how parents can support school activities and learning at home. There are other ways to take an active role in your child's education. You can serve as a school volunteer, become a paid paraprofessional and/or professional in the schools, keep informed on school matters, learn new educational skills, and participate in decisionmaking through organized parent groups, especially Parent Advisory Councils.

Volunteer

The role that often introduces parents to involvement in their child's education outside the home is that of the school volunteer. Especially today, with rising educational costs and limited tax resources, the role of the school volunteer is crucial in maintaining quality education. Imagine the additional resources available to the school--and the personalized attention each child might receive--if each parent volunteered to work at the school 1 hour a week.

How To Recruit Volunteers. Local educational officials set a school's policy on volunteers. Most schools welcome parent volunteers, but few actively recruit them. If this is true of your school, you may be able to help recruit other parents.

Volunteers who are reluctant to step forward will often respond to a personal contact by a teacher or the principal. Group recruitment, particularly when done through an organized parent or community group, may also be effective. Sometimes you can combine both approaches. For instance, you might invite people attending a group meeting to fill out forms similar to that in Illustration 4 on page 39. The principal and/or teacher can then

follow up with a personal note or phone call, knowing the person contacted wants to do volunteer work, and the work and hours preferred.

Volunteer Activities. Some parents may be eager to work with the school but do not know how they can be useful. It is important to emphasize that everyone has something to offer a school and its students. Volunteer activities may include working with children in the classroom under the direction of the teacher; acting as a tutor; supervising field trips, the lunchroom, or playground; working in the school library; reading to children; organizing special activities for children, such as a performance by a local musical group or a visit from Humane Society personnel; helping teachers administer tests and grade papers; and teaching children a special skill such as wood carving, needlepoint, or stamp collecting.

Schools also need volunteers in areas not directly related to children. You might offer to help in the office, answering phones and typing; to provide transportation when necessary; to design bulletin boards; or to help the nurse in screening children for sight and hearing problems.

Getting Started. School volunteers feel more comfortable when they receive some training in what they are expected to do.

Schools have developed a variety of methods for training volunteers.

At Alamo Elementary School in San Francisco, the principal conducts workshops to train volunteers to teach and help. The workshops help Alamo teachers, who give the instruction, to overcome their hesitancy about active parent involvement, and they help parents to feel more adequate and prepared in their roles as volunteers.

The Florida Parent Education Model, a model for the national Follow Through program, emphasizes the importance of a general orientation session for all volunteers, followed by practical "how to" training sessions. For instance, a sample guide to teach volunteers how to encourage children to talk through the use of stories includes the following methods:

- Have children make their own book out of construction paper, wall paper scraps, glue, masking tape, and cardboard.
- Suggest that a child tell you a story. Then write the story down for the child.
- Reread the story with the child.
- Encourage the child to illustrate the story.
- For very young children, make a mimeographed book with pages that have open-ended sentences:

  My name is _____.
  My favorite color is_____.
  I like to_____.

Affecting School Policy

Once you become actively involved in the school--by serving as a volunteer, by reading school information that is sent home or published in the local media, and by attending school functions, as well as by observing your own children--you begin to form judgments about the school.

You can often resolve problems between a child and a teacher or within a classroom by talking with the teacher and, if necessary, the principal. Seeking advice on how to help is a way to deal with the problem while respecting the authority of teacher or principal. It is also helpful to first emphasize the good things you see in the classroom or school, and to avoid complaining or placing blame. Many problems are simply misunderstandings,

or reflect a teacher's need to be concerned with 20 to 30 children instead of only yours.

However, when a problem is serious or widespread, a number of parents may feel the need for a change in school policy or decisions. To achieve change, a chorus is more effective than a lone voice, and you will find it most effective to act as part of a group.

Most schools have well-organized parent/teacher organizations or home and school associations. Such groups traditionally raise funds and plan social events for the school. As parents and taxpayers, their members may also choose to take part in the planning, operation, and evaluation of the school program.

Advisory groups are another way for parents to advocate change in education.

A number of federally funded education programs, including Title I, Head Start, and Follow Through, have strongly recommended, and later required, parental involvement since the late 1960's.

For example, school districts in low-income areas that receive Title I money must establish a parent advisory council (PAC) at both district and school levels to advise the program managers. There are specific rules on the makeup and functions of these councils.

In addition to the required functions that relate to planning, operating, and evaluating Title I programs, the councils act as a link between school and community. They can and do support and promote Title I activities, and encourage a broad range of parent involvement in the schools.

The process that school districts use to establish Title I parent advisory councils may be adapted for any similar advisory group. If you understand how the process works, you can cooperate with school officials in considering each of these six important steps: preparation, membership, training, organization, support, and evaluation.

Preparation simply means laying the groundwork for involvement. Some parents and other members of the community feel ill at ease in a school atmosphere; thus, they are afraid to ask questions or to make suggestions. A parent advisory council cannot be successful in this type of atmosphere. Parents and school officials should prepare for increased involvement by improving school-home relationships, by helping teachers and administrators understand the positive effects of parental involvement, and by making parents feel welcome in the schools.

How is this done? The workshops at Alamo School in San Francisco, cited earlier in this chapter, are one way. Many school districts now employ a parent coordinator who can help parents and administrators plan discussion and orientation sessions. Some school districts sponsor a series of get-to-know-you and social events for parents to get them used to coming to the school and feeling comfortable.

Membership on parent advisory councils should be representative of the children in the school(s). To make sure that the needs of all children are considered, members should include parents of children of different ages, grades, and abilities; and children in regular and special education classes.

Council membership often grows out of membership in a parent/teacher organization. The larger membership of the parent/teacher organization may

elect representatives to serve on an advisory council. The number of members on an advisory council will vary from district to district and school to school, depending on the size of the area being served and the number of students. Groups of 10 to 20 persons are large enough to provide a broad range of ideas, but small enough to allow everybody to participate.

Training is an important ingredient in insuring the success of any parent involvement. If you are to function effectively in an advisory role, you will need training in the planning, operation, and evaluation of the school program.

School administrators should provide such training as an ongoing portion of the program. However, you also have a responsibility to locate information you feel you need, to ask questions, and to find out for yourself what is happening in the schools.

A helpful source of ideas and models for parent training at each level of involvement are the Follow Through Resource Centers. The centers are successful educational programs that receive Federal funds to provide training and materials on request from other schools.

The organization of the parent advisory council is entirely up to council members. Most councils find it helpful to establish committees that correspond to the school board or faculty committees in the district or school area they serve; thus, there are likely to be financial, curriculum, extracurricular, assessment, and pupil assignment committees. There should also be a committee directly concerned with parental involvement.

Illustration 5 is a checklist for the chairperson of a parent advisory council, prepared by the Federal Programs Department in Erie, Pa.;

it indicates the importance of advanced planning. Illustration 6, from the Title I office in the Mississippi State Department of Education, provides a simple outline for conducting a parent council meeting.

To be successful, parent groups need support from school officials. School districts must provide members of Title I parent advisory councils with any information they need to perform their duties. This includes copies of all Federal program applications and evaluations. If you are really to serve as advisors for the schools, you need information about testing, numbers of children in special programs, teacher qualifications, and other matters of public record.

The checklists on the following pages will help you to evaluate how effectively you and other parents are involved in your school or school district. Continuing evaluation shows you how to become more active and have a greater say in the education of your children.

Functions. As an initial project, the parent advisory council may want to inventory community resources that parents can use. The more information parents have about available services, the more likely it is that both children and their families will receive adequate services in the areas of health, educational counseling (for adults as well as children), vocational training, welfare, job information, and housing.

The first question you should ask is, "What are the problems we have and what services do we need?" Then take a good look at the education, social service, legal, financial, health, career, and family development agencies in your area and decide which would be most helpful. We have listed below some typical services that may help you to identify the resources available in your own community.

Education Agencies

1. adult education programs through the local school district
2. community colleges
3. continuing education programs in area colleges and universities
4. trade and vocational schools
5. General Educational Development (GED) programs through the local school district or vocational schools
6. public libraries

Social Service Agencies

1. Housing
   a. local department of housing or city development
   b. redevelopment land agencies
   c. local HUD (Federal Housing and Urban Development) office
   d. Community Action Agencies
   e. public housing authority
   f. tenant associations

2. Family Development
   a. family services
   b. family counseling agencies
   c. guidance and counseling office within the public schools
   d. area hospitals
   e. churches
   f. Big Brother/Big Sister and similar organizations
   g. parent helplines
   h. parents anonymous

3. Food/clothing
   a. local welfare offices
   b. school breakfast and lunch programs
   c. local programs through churches, government agencies, and private organizations
   d. Salvation Army
   e. Goodwill Industries

4. Transportation
   a. local welfare offices
   b. local transit authority
   c. services for the handicapped

5. Child Care
   a. community-sponsored day care centers
   b. private day care centers
   c. settlement houses
   d. churches
   e. National Organization of Women

Health Service Agencies

1. local clinics, both public and private
2. mental health associations
3. Red Cross
4. school nurse
5. Visiting Nurses Association
6. dental clinics
7. drug and alcohol treatment centers
8. college or university dental, eye, and hearing clinics

Legal Services

1. Legal Aid
2. public defender's office
3. consumer protection agencies--local, State, and Federal
4. local bar association
5. American Civil Liberties Union
6. Better Business Bureau
7. League of Women Voters
8. college or university student law associations

Financial/Economic Services

1. State and local welfare agencies
2. school social service department
3. Social Security
4. local commercial banks and lending institutions
5. budget planning offices

The checklist on page 44 includes some questions to help you evaluate the effectiveness of community resources.

Illustration 4

SCHOOL VOLUNTEER INTEREST SURVEY

NAME_____ ADDRESS_____

PHONE NUMBER _____

SPECIAL INTERESTS _____

DAY/TIME AVAILABLE _____

GRADE PREFERRED _____

Are you a parent? _____ grandparent? _____ neighborhood resident? _____

Illustration 5

CHAIRPERSON'S CHECKLIST FOR MEETINGS

Preliminary Activities

A. Room arrangements

1. Have arrangements been made for a meeting room?
2. Will the room be comfortable?
3. Are there enough chairs?
4. Have arrangements been made for special equipment if needed?
5. If there are handouts, are there enough for everybody?
6. Will notices be sent out in time for people who plan to attend?
7. If needed, is there a telephone committee ready to remind members of the meeting?

B. Program arrangements

1. Has the agenda been prepared and mailed to members?
2. Have speakers been invited to participate?
3. Does the speaker have the time, place, room number for the meeting? Does he or she know how long to talk and how large the group will be?

C. Other activities

1. Have refreshments been planned?
2. Have arrangements for babysitting been made?

The Day of the Meeting

1. Do you plan to arrive early to doublecheck the room, equipment, chairs, and refreshments?
2. Are there signs to direct people to the meeting room?
3. Have you made arrangements for someone to meet and greet the speaker?
4. Will someone greet people when they arrive? Are there nametags?
5. Will you have extra copies of the agenda available?

After the Meeting

1. Will you be available to talk with members? Some hesitate to speak at meetings and have ideas you will want to consider.
2. Will you thank the speaker? A written note is very effective.
3. Have you tidied up the room as much as possible?
4. Will you make arrangements to return any equipment?

Illustration 6

PROCEDURES FOR CONDUCTING A MEETING

There are eight steps that the chairperson should follow in holding a meeting:

1. Call the meeting to order.
2. Hear the minutes of the previous meeting.
3. Hear reports of officers, boards, and standing committees.
4. Hear reports of special committees.
5. Hear announcements.
6. Go on with the unfinished business of the last meeting.
7. Go on to new business.
8. End meeting and adjourn.

How to Make a Motion. A proposal for action is made in the form of a motion. For the council to consider the motion, at least two members must be in favor of it. The first member makes the motion, and the second member seconds the motion to show his or her approval.

This is how a motion is made:

1. Stand and address the chairperson--"Mr. (Ms.) Chairperson." Wait until you are recognized by the chairperson. Do not speak until the chairperson recognizes you by a sign or by name.
2. Be sure you have your motion clearly in mind and worded as briefly as possible.
3. When you have been recognized, state the motion so that all can hear. "I move that . . ."
4. After the motion has been made, another member, without waiting to be recognized, calls out, "I second the motion."
5. The motion having been made and seconded, the chairperson repeats the motion by saying: "It has been moved and seconded that . . ."
6. When the chairperson has stated the motion, it is said to be pending. It may now be considered by the council; that is, it is open to discussion and debate.
7. Any member may now rise to agree or disagree with the proposal.
8. The chairperson inquires, "Is there any further discussion?" If none, the chairperson asks, "Are you ready for the question?" The members call out, "Question!" The response, "Question," is a parliamentary form that shows that the members are ready to vote.
9. Except where special rules apply, a majority vote is usually required to pass a motion. The chairperson calls first for the votes in favor of a motion. A voice vote is most often used, although members may also be asked to show their hands, or stand. A standing vote is sometimes used to verify the results of a voice vote.
10. The chairperson then announces the vote: "The Ayes have it. The motion is carried." Or, "The No's have it. The motion is defeated."

For a more detailed discussion of parliamentary procedures, see Robert's Rules of Order, available in most libraries.

CHECKLIST: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Personal Evaluation

1. Do I attend parent meetings?

2. Do I volunteer my services at my child's school?

3. Do I read newsletters and/or notes from the school?

4. Do I visit my child's classroom, other than at conference time?

5. Do I know if my school or school district has a parent advisory council (PAC)?

6. Have I attended a PAC meeting?

7. Do I discuss my child's school with:

   Other parents?

   My child's teacher?

   The principal?

   Other administrators?

8. Do I know what role parents have in planning, carrying out, and reviewing the instructional program at my child's school?

9. Am I involved in such activities?

10. Do I know how to make a complaint about my child's school?

    Do I discuss the problem first with the person(s) most directly involved?

    If we cannot resolve the problem, do I talk with other appropriate school officials and/or parent groups?

School Policy

1. Are parents made to feel welcome in my child's school?

2. Is there a place set aside for parents to get together at the school?

3. How many parents are volunteers at the school?

4. What do they do?

5. Is there a Parent Teacher Organization or some organized parent group at the school?

6. How often does the group meet? When? Where?

7. Does the principal meet regularly with parents?

8. Are parents involved in planning and carrying out the school program?

9. How do teachers feel about parents' involvement in the school?

10. Does the school employ a parent coordinator? Is there a staff member specifically responsible for parent contacts?

Evaluating Parent Advisory Councils

Membership

1. How many members are on the council?
2. How were they selected?
3. Are they representative of the parents in the district or school?
4. Are parents who are not members involved in council activities?

Meetings

1. Does the council have regularly scheduled meetings?
2. When? Where?
3. Are the meetings well publicized in advance and open to the public?
4. Do parents other than council members have an opportunity to speak at meetings?
5. Are council decisions and/or recommendations sent to all parents?

Training

1. Is there a training program for members of the parent advisory council?
2. What does it involve?
3. Do council members have basic information about the organizational structure of the local school district?
   - Names and phone numbers of administrators?
   - The basic curriculum in the district or school?
   - Special programs that are available within the school(s)?

Activities

1. Is there a written statement of the responsibilities of the parent advisory council?
2. Have both administrators and council members agreed to the statement?
3. Has the council been involved in the following activities:

Identifying the needs of children in the school or district?
Establishing a list of educational priorities?
Reviewing proposals for new programs?
Planning new programs or changes in existing programs?
Reviewing textbooks and/or tests being considered for use in the school(s)?
Evaluating school programs?

4. Does the council involve other parents in school activities?
5. Has the council established a complaint procedure for parents? Does the principal or superintendent agree with the procedure?

Support

1. Are funds available to cover parent council expenses, such as mailing, supply, and clerical costs?
2. Is space made available for meetings at times that are convenient to parents?
3. Do council members receive all the information they need to fulfill their responsibilities?
4. Does the principal (or superintendent) seriously consider the recommendations of the council?
5. Is there a staff member assigned as a liaison to the council?

Evaluating Community Resources

1. Exactly what services does the agency offer?

2. What is the cost involved? Are the services available without charge in some cases?

3. Who is eligible for services?

4. How does a person qualify for services? (e.g., is there an application to fill out, must any records be provided, what other steps are required?)

5. What other kinds of services are available through the agency?

6. How do I actually get the services?
   Telephone for an appointment?
   Wait in line?

7. Are records of this agency confidential?

8. Does the agency receive government funding?

APPENDIX

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN

Books, magazine articles, television talk shows, speeches at parent/teacher association meetings . . . all at one time or another remind us that learning begins at home and parents are a child's first teachers.

Although many educational studies support this fact they may not tell you specific things that you, as parents, can do to help children learn. How can you help prepare a child for school? What can you do at home to give children a better start in reading? What activities support the basic skills being taught in school?

Fortunately, there are some simple activities that we know help young children to learn. For example, take them lots of places--on a bus, to the grocery store, to a park, the zoo, or museum; talk with them and answer their questions (children learn new words mainly by listening and then talking); and choose games that challenge their ability to think.

It's easy to encourage children to read, too. Keep books, magazines, and newspapers around the house; take regular trips to the library; read bedtime stories and, when they're ready, let them read to you; and play easy word games. Even television can help children become good readers. Five daily programs on public television that emphasize reading readiness and reading skills are Electric Company, Magic Pages, Readalong, Sesame Street, and the bilingual program Carrascolendas. One or more may be available in your area. Some of the programs also introduce basic math skills in ways that you can repeat at home; for instance, children can arrange common household objects by size, measure ingredients for recipes they like, or even play Bingo.

The checklists that follow will give you a general idea of what you can do at home to support your child's learning. We have also included specific examples of easy, at-home activities that you can use to encourage the development of basic learning skills.

You can find hundreds of other ideas in books, magazines, and pamphlets at the public library. In addition, most school districts have guides for teachers or brochures for parents that outline simple activities. Reading or mathematics resource teachers often use common household objects--such as pieces of cardboard, backs from frozen pizza packages, coffee cans, and buttons--to design classroom games. Parents are welcome to copy such ideas for use at home.

CHECKLIST: HOME ACTIVITIES

Supplies

Do we have:

1. A dictionary?
2. Ruler and yardstick, at least one with metric measurements?
3. Lined paper?
4. Pencils and pens?
5. Newspapers?
6. Magazines?
7. Books appropriate for the age and reading ability of each child (either their own or from the library)?
8. Puzzles?
9. Games appropriate for the age of each child?
10. Library cards?

Language Development

Do I:

1. Talk often with my child?
2. Speak clearly, slowly, and softly?
3. Listen with interest to what my child is saying?
4. Insist that my young child use words as soon as he or she is able?
5. Encourage my child to talk in complete sentences?
6. Encourage my older child to find and use words that best express his or her thoughts?
7. Read to my child?
8. Ask my child questions about what I read?

9. Encourage my child to tell me about his or her experiences?

10. Teach my child the parts of the body?

11. Encourage my child to tell the colors and shapes of toys and other things in the house?

12. Help my child to express his or her feelings?

13. Avoid interrupting my child?

Reading

Do I:

1. Read to my child?

2. Let my child read to me?

3. Read something myself every day?

4. Let my child see me reading?

5. Have a library card?

6. Take my child to the library?

7. Subscribe to a newspaper and/or magazines?

8. Have books in the house?

9. Buy books for my child?

10. Watch for signs of hearing or sight problems with my child?

11. Contact my child's teacher if I notice he or she has problems reading?

12. Find time to play reading games with my child?

Math

Do I:

1. Point out numbers on printed materials--calendars, boxtops, street signs?

2. Teach my child to tell time?

3. Help my child to understand measurements--by using rulers, tape measures, and measuring cups?

4. Teach my child to understand the value of money, to tell the difference between one coin and another, and know how much each is worth?

5. Encourage my child to use numbers--by counting, doing dot-to-dot pictures, playing Bingo or Yahtze or shopping?

6. Let my child see me using math skills--balancing the checkbook, figuring out the budget, paying the paper boy, checking change from the grocery store?

7. Understand the school's math program?

8. Encourage my child in math?

Self-Concept

Do I:

1. Give my child responsibilities suitable to his or her age and ability?

2. Establish rules for my child?

3. Praise my child often?

4. Sometimes reward my child for a job well done--with a hug, something special to eat, or playing an extra game?

5. Discipline my child when the need arises, being sure he or she understands why?

6. Encourage my child to try new things?

7. Help my child cope with frustration or failure?

8. Provide opportunities for my child to succeed?

9. Set realistic goals for my child, both at home and at school?

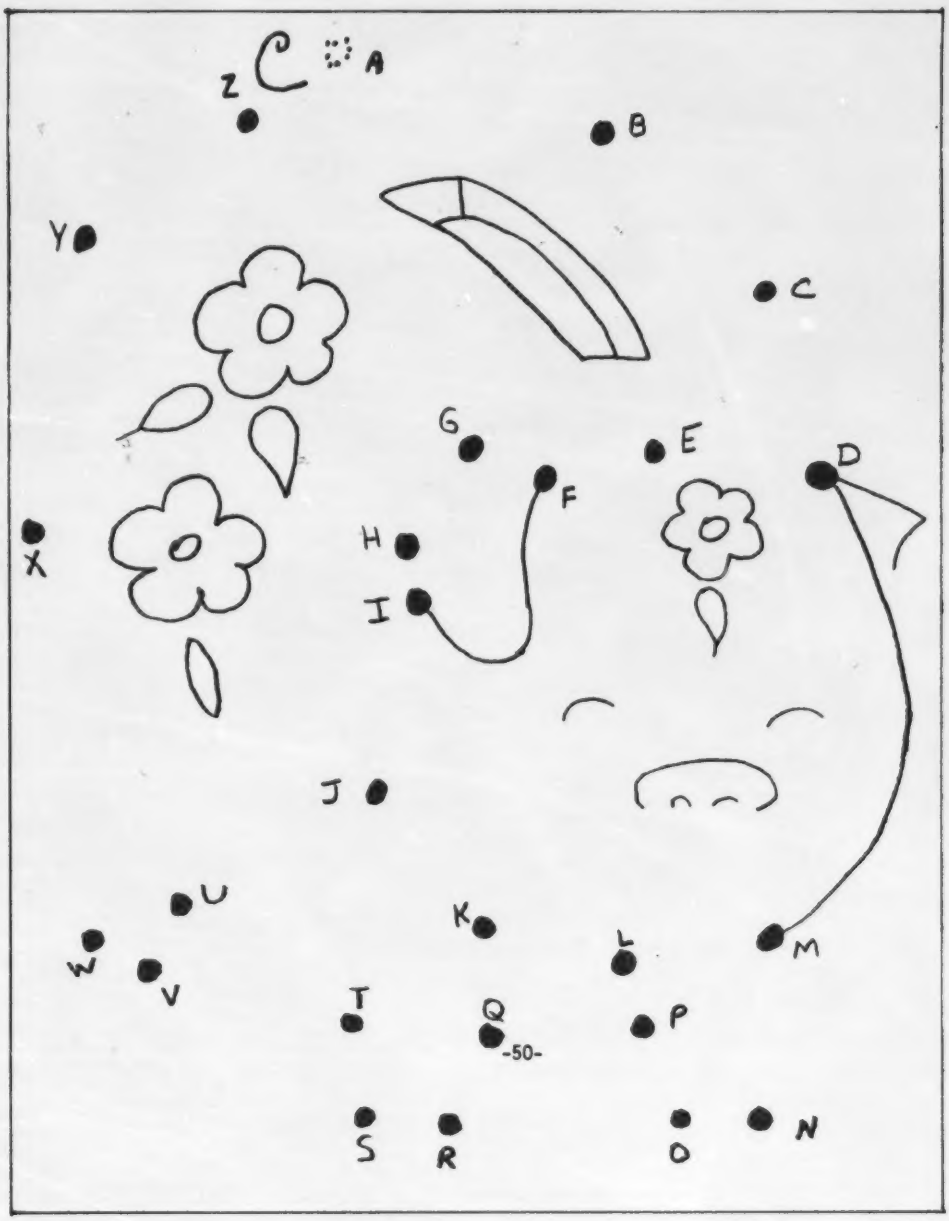
10. Try to provide a happy home atmosphere?

11. Try to set aside time to spend with my child?

LEARNING GAMES

Preschool Ideas

Learning ABC's. Most children first learn their ABC's by singing them. Help them to recognize the letters of the alphabet by taking simple pictures from a favorite coloring book and making them dot-to-dot pictures, using the ABC's. Until they know the alphabet well, write it down on a slip of paper to make it easier for them to follow the order of the letters.



Following Directions. As you work around the house, play a version of "Follow the Leader" with a preschool child. They must follow by listening closely to your directions. For example: Take five steps forward; go behind the chair; turn right; skip to the door; go ahead five steps; crawl under the table; climb over the chair. Taking the time to laugh at mistakes and silly directions makes this simple activity more fun.

Learning New Words. Pick up a catalog at any store. Let the child cut or tear pictures out of the catalog. Together, talk about the pictures. Which does he or she know the names for? What are the others? Who would use the objects in the pictures?

Story Telling. It's the children's time to tell the story--about anything they wish. As they tell the story, you write it down--and read it at bedtime.

The Alphabet. Write the letters of the alphabet--capital and small letters--on little sheets of paper several times each (or cut letters from headlines of the newspaper). Then write one letter on a larger sheet of paper. Let the child go through the pile of letters and find all letters that are the same as that you printed on the large sheet.

The Calendar. Make a calendar for the month with small stars or circles in a pocket at the bottom. At the end of each day, the child can cover that date if he or she can read the number (they may need some hints at first).

Primary Ideas

Learning ABC's. Children love games, and Bingo, because it goes quickly, is especially fun. Make several Bingo cards using letters of the alphabet. Also write letters on small slips of paper. Put the letters in a paper bag and shake. Pull the letters out one at a time and let the child find the matching letter on the Bingo card. As children become older, say a word that begins with the letter instead and let them match it on the Bingo card.

Of course, regular Bingo is a good way of introducing children to two-digit numbers.

A	M	J	D	V
Q	C	S	Y	I
U	G	FREE	O	R
F	W	N	H	L
K	P	E	T	B

Writing It Down. Help children keep track of their "special things"--the summer art class, a trip to the lake, a visit from Grandma, a birthday party. Plain sheets of paper or a regular scrapbook will do. Gather mementos of each event and paste in the "Memory Book." Also help write a short story. Let the child dictate (and, if possible, do the writing with a little help). Occasionally read the entire book together.

Listening. Gather together some household items such as egg beater, toaster, pot, paper bag, tissue paper, newspaper, whistle, and timer. Let the child use or touch each one to see what noise it makes. Then have them close their eyes, and you make the noise. Can the child guess which item you're using?

Word Games For The Car. Play the before and after game. What letter comes before e but after c? What letter comes before z but after x?

Or the letter sound game. I have a letter d. What word begins with the "d" sound? Or reverse it. My word is bag. What letter does bag start with? end with? Give the children a chance to quiz you too.

Word games are also ideal for bedtime. Instead of counting sheep, how about thinking of 15 words that begin with the "sh" sound?

Shopping. Let the children help with the shopping. For example, when you reach the soup section remind them you need chicken noodle soup. Can they find it? Review the letters that make this "ch" sound. Try it in the cereal section.

Egg Carton Math. Print a different number at the bottom of each section of an empty egg carton. Put two small buttons in the egg carton and close it. Shake the carton and then open it. Add, subtract, or multiply the two numbers that are marked in the cups containing the buttons. Try it again.

Dial-A-Word Math. Without taking the telephone off the receiver, have the child dial a simple word--tree, water, ball. Add up the numbers you had to dial.

Playing Store. Have the child choose 10 non-breakable objects out of the food cabinet. Be sure prices are marked on each. If the child has $1.00, which items could he or she buy? What about 50¢?

With older children, parents can make up a grocery list using any or all of the 10 objects. Have the children figure out the total bill. What would the change from a $5 bill be? From $10?

Counting. Most children know how to count from 1 to 10 when they start kindergarten. To help them develop this skill, write the numbers from 1 to 10 on colorful scraps of paper; then mix them up in a small box. Have the child dump the pieces of paper out and put the numbers in order. At first, a child may need the help of a guide sheet (with the numbers already in order).

Most children's games involve some counting. Playing such games with children helps parents know if preschool children are learning to count.

Intermediate Ideas

Vocabulary. Now students are ready for a real challenge. Think of one category of words--household items, sports, animals, or whatever. Take 10 words of different lengths and scramble them up. Let the student play "The Scrambler" by figuring out what the words are. For instance, with sports words:

1. K T B L A L S E B A _____
2. U Q R A E C T _____
3. L O G A I E _____
4. E L M H T E _____
5. P R M U I E _____
6. U L O F _____
7. D L U E H D _____
8. I E T U F D E L R O _____
9. F O L G _____
10. W T H O N D O U C _____

ANSWERS: 1. Basketball 6. Foul
2. Racquet 7. Huddle
3. Goalie 8. Outfielder
4. Helmet 9. Golf
5. Umpire 10. Touchdown

Word Riddles. Word riddles test students' listening skills and spelling. Some ideas: What animal is in a box? (ox) What makes a witch scratch? (Take away the w to make her itch.) How do you make mice cold? (Take away the m and they turn into ice.) How can you make a tire hot? (Take away the t, add an f, and it's fire.)

Understanding A Story. Cut a favorite comic strip out of the Sunday paper. Cut each box apart and mix up. Let the child read each section and piece the story together.

Building Words. Cut letters and blends (two-consonant combinations such as ch, sh, sl) from newspaper headlines and put in a shoe box. Give the child a letter or blend. Allow ten minutes to make all the words he or she can beginning with that letter or blend and using the other letters in the box. Then let the child watch you try.

Family Learning. At dinner each night everyone in the family--including, mom, dad, and grandparents--gives a new word they learned and tells everyone what it means.

Reading a children's classic together at night--chapter by chapter--can be fun for everyone. Take turns reading out loud. Everyone should read with lots of expression, even giving different voices to the characters if possible.

Body Measurements. Have the child measure different parts of his or her body--the thumb, wrist, foot, length of leg from knee to toe, distance from top of head to tip of nose. Measure first in inches, then in centimeters. Make a chart of the measurements. Now try the same measurements on someone else in the family. How do they compare?

"Buzz". An old-fashioned game that develops math skills. One player starts counting, "1." The next player says "2," and so on. For any number with a 7 in it, such as 17, 27, 37, a player says "buzz" instead of the number. "Buzz" is also used if the number is a multiple of 7, such as 14, 21, or 28. A player who makes a mistake drops out of the game.

Activities For Upper Grades

As children grow older and progress to the middle and upper grades in school, they are required more and more to work independently and to use more complex thought processes. The following activities will help your child develop skills necessary for success in the upper grades.

Write directions for going from your home to a place the child is familiar with. Make an intentional mistake and see if he or she can locate it.

Provide your child with models that require that he or she read and follow directions in order to put them together.

Let the child plan the family vegetable garden. Using the almanac and the instructions on the seed packets, he or she can determine when and how the seeds should be planted. Encourage the child to make a chart showing where each vegetable should be planted, how far apart they should be, and when they can be harvested.

Let your child select a recipe and prepare the dish for the family.

When a new game is purchased, have your child read the directions for playing it and explain them to the other family members.

Have your child sort the laundry using the directions on the detergent box to decide which clothes can be washed together, at what temperature and speed, and how much detergent to use.

Have your child use the telephone book to practice alphabetical order by locating the addresses of people on your Christmas card list. The yellow pages can be useful in teaching classification--find which insurance companies specialize in auto insurance for teenagers, which

TV repair shop is nearest your home, or which stores sell a particular brand of radio.

Have your child rewrite your grocery list, classifying foods by categories so your shopping will be easier.

Have your child use the grocery ads in the newspaper to help you plan your shopping.

Have your child start a file for discount coupons. He or she can use a shoe box and make dividers classifying the coupons.

Teenagers always look forward to the time when they can own a car of their own. Many math and reading activities can center around planning for this day.

Help them learn the procedure for obtaining a driver's license. Get a booklet of driving regulations for them to study at home.

Teenagers who have a part time job can begin to plan what the exact cost of owning and operating a car will be and how much they will have to save in order to cover all expenses. You can help them in the following ways:

Take them to the bank and open a savings account in their name. Explain interest rates on savings--most bank personnel will be happy to do this for their young customers.

Read the newspaper ads to get prices on various models.

Help them check on driver's training. Is it free or will they have to pay a fee?

Have them check with various insurance agents to locate the best insurance rates.

Have them check with the motor vehicle registration office to learn the cost of license plates.

When all the information is gathered, you will be able to help them determine the total cost of a car and how much they will have to save each year in order to buy one.

You can also help them estimate the cost of operating a car for a year. What are the long term expenses such as insurance and license fees? How much will they need to set aside each month in order to meet these obligations? What will it cost to operate the car on a monthly basis. How far will the car be driven each week? Based on the number of miles per gallon the car will get, what will be the gasoline cost? What will be the cost of maintenance?

Whether your child is interested in a long range project like the one above or has short range goals such as buying equipment for a hobby or special interest, you can help him or her use and expand the skills learned at school in a meaningful way. Additionally, you have become involved in his or her plans for the future.

*U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1980 O-302-615